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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR AU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV CD

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL REFORM COMMITTEE BLESSES DECREE ON
ELECTORAL CODE ENFORCEMENT

REF: A. N'DJAMENA 152

1B. NDJAMENA 139

1C. NDJAMENA 192

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet dissemination.

11. (SBU) Summary: Chad's Electoral Reform Committee (Comite de Suivie) met June 17 to respond formally to a Governmental Decree (Decret 621), signed June 6 by President Deby, on the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) in enforcing Chad's Electoral Code. Decree 621 seems to have been issued as a result of advice from jurists representing the Organisation de la francophonie, who visited Chad in April to suggest ways of overcoming disagreement between various organs of the Government of Chad and the National Assembly on means of conducting elections, planned for 2010-2011 (Ref A).

12. (SBU) At the June 17 meeting, members of the Electoral Reform Committee praised Decree 621, making clear that they viewed it as an effective method of unblocking a political process that has often reached impasse as the Chadian body politic grapples with preparing for the nation's first potentially free and fair election (Ref B). At the same time, international observers of the June 17 meeting of the Committee pointed out that two accompanying draft legislative bills (projets de loi) prepared by the ruling party, one on the role of the opposition and the other on the functioning of political parties, would offer all concerned a chance to stall the electoral process further, if that appeared desirable, as the National Assembly is currently out of session. (Note: Our contacts at the National Assembly report that the body will likely sit in extraordinary session on/about June 25 to consider Chad's revised national budget. The session has been given a mandate to address other "reform" agenda items, so an opportunity to take action on the draft bills does exist. End note.) Government members of the Electoral Reform Committee called for establishment of a date certain for elections, while opposition members of the Committee agreed that establishment of a date would be a good idea -- at some point in the future, by means yet to be determined. End Summary.

DECREE 621

¶13. (SBU) President Deby's latest Decree has received positive attention in the local media, from members of the Electoral Reform Committee and from representatives of political parties, since it was promulgated June 6. The document (e-mailed to AF/C) specifies respective duties of the CENI, Electoral Reform Committee, Bureau of Elections and other state organs, confusion among which was one of the matters that jurists from the Organisation de la francophonie who visited here in the spring sought to address. Voting mechanisms for nomads, another topic on which the jurists pronounced, are defined: nomads are to vote where they are counted in the national census currently under way (see below). Responsibility for proposing increases in the number of seats in the National Assembly is given to the CENI. Opposition figures on the Electoral Reform Commission made clear in the course of the June 17 meeting that they viewed the Decree as a step forward that could prove that the August 13, 2007 Agreement on governance in Chad was still functioning, and that might pave the way for free and fair elections.

TWO CLEVER BILLS

¶14. (SBU) Also discussed at the June 17 meeting was a draft bill on the "Legal Status of the Political Opposition in Chad," and a second draft bill on "Entitlements of Political Parties." Although both bills (e-mailed to AF/C) appear to embrace and codify democratic principles, the fact that they have been prepared by the governing party during a recess in the National Assembly's schedule suggests that they might be designed to slow progress toward elections, particularly if

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it should be decided that their passage is necessary prior to elections, and if they spark any sort of debate.

NO DATE FOR ELECTIONS

¶15. (SBU) Members of the Deby Administration who attended the June 17 meeting congratulated their President for having taken steps to hasten peaceful transfer of power, and called on opposition members of the Electoral Reform Committee to come to consensus with them on dates for various electoral contests. Opposition members of the Committee expressed support for the notion of settling on dates, but seemed pointedly unprepared to undertake that task at the present meeting or in the near term.

NEXT STEPS

¶16. (SBU) Although it appears to us and to other regular international observers of the Electoral Reform Committee that dates for Chadian elections could indeed be fixed at any time, we believe that the Committee wants to involve the National Assembly more formally in decisionmaking. Thus the next milestone, if there is one, will likely occur in the course of the June 25 extraordinary legislative session.

CENSUS

¶17. (SBU) Meanwhile, Chad's national census -- the precursor to elections, and paid for largely by the U.S. -- continues (Ref C). Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is being conducted in an effective manner. Whole sectors of N'Djamena have been visited by census-takers, and the Embassy's PAO and local employees have observed census agents on the job in the countryside. Regional and local officials seem to be taking an active interest in the count and promoting participation

in it. Some critics have charged that census-takers lack experience and that the GoC has not been generous with transportation provisions, but our assessment is that Chad is doing relatively well with this basic governmental process, and that it has made headway before the summer rains make many roads impassable.

RELATED MATTERS

¶8. (SBU) In the wake of the announcement of draft bills on the opposition and political parties, we have received notification that some smaller political parties have decided to regroup as a single unit. In a nation where more than 80 political parties are registered, where opposition sometimes becomes a lifestyle, and where coalition-building is a relatively new concept, we regard this as a positive development.

BREMNER